MEDIA TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE POST-COMMUNIST WORLD

EASTERN EUROPE'S TORTURED PATH TO CHANGE

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Chapter 4
From Political Propaganda To Political Marketing. Changing Patterns of Political Communication in Central and Eastern Europe

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Changes in Media Freedom

Throughout the 1990s, a series of media wars swept across the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and especially Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. Despite the formal declaration of media freedom during the political transformations in 1989–1991, the new (sometimes new–old) political elites, convinced that the media could shape public opinion, continued to exert pressure on the news media in an effort to gain votes. Although their attempts to control media generated wide–scale protest with the opposition of the day, parts of the journalistic community and civil society, analysts and activists unanimously described a deficit of media freedom[1] during this period in the region's countries, and noted that the performance of the news media was falling short of both

normative expectations and the standards set by the media in more advanced democracies. They called for the emergence of independent and plural media that enable citizens to make informed choices when casting their ballot (Splichal, 1994; Paletz et al., 1995; Sparks & Reading, 1998; Gross, 2002; Jakubowicz, 2003).

From the early 1990s up until the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the status of media freedom improved gradually but hectically in the region's countries. As of 2010, Freedom House's quantitative data listed most of them among the 'free press' countries, the exceptions to this rule being Bulgaria and Romania, which were described as 'partly free.[2] Qualitative analyses published toward the end of the 2000s also drew an increasingly optimistic picture of the status of media freedom in the region (Czepek et al., 2009), even though they noted that a certain deal of political pressure had persisted, especially on local media outlets and public broadcasters (Hrvatin & Petković, 2004; Dragomir & Thompson, 2008).

Because the Freedom House surveys primarily address issues of political intervention,[3] a greater deal of media freedom is arguably indicative of a lesser extent of political pressure on the media, as compared with the early post-transformation period. The consolidation of media freedom[4] has begun in the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, yet it proved to be a long process uncompleted to date: the status of media freedom is, as a general rule, still poorer in 'new Europe' than in 'old Europe.' Analysts in search of factors delaying the consolidation of media freedom argue that the legacy of a communist past dies hard; institutional and cultural change does not occur overnight. The institutions—laws, supervisory structures and funds—that had ensured the political control of mass communication systems under the late state socialist regimes need time before they are fully transformed into buffers that protect and enhance media freedom. Politicians' attitudes toward the media also need time before they meet normative expectations; they must learn the rules of the democratic game, including respect for the media's independence (Bajomi-Lázár, 2008). To use Karl Popper's terms: it takes time for closed societies to turn into open ones (cf. Popper, 1966).

This chapter looks into changing patterns of media politics and political communication in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe over the past twenty years, focusing on Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Romania.[5] First, it gives an overview of some of the major changes that have occurred in the region's media landscapes, and then it argues that political communication has undergone a major paradigm shift in that classic techniques of political propaganda have given way to modern methods of political marketing. Finally, it describes some of the findings of a series of interviews conducted with spin doctors and senior politicians in the region in 2011 in order to assess politicians' attitude toward and uses of the media.

Changes in the Media Landscape

Media landscapes are transforming rapidly across the globe, and analysts focus on various aspects of the ensuing changes. Here, only those issues will be recalled that seem to be relevant to media politics and political communication in Central and Eastern Europe.

Firstly, the media landscapes of the region's countries went through substantial institutional change in the 1990s, when the former communist countries that were to join the European Union needed to adapt their legislation to European standards. On the one hand, this institutional change implied the deregulation of the print press and the broadcast media. The privatization of newspapers and broadcasters, controversial as it was, allowed multinational media conglomerates and domestic investors to purchase news outlets in the countries of the region. Political elites could no longer interfere with media content directly through funding or the appointment and removal of top media personnel, and they frequently encountered resistance from media investors, for it would be against the business interests of private companies to associate themselves with any of the political forces; this would amount to losing those parts of their audiences that advocate different views. (There are, however, some notable exceptions to this rule. Some domestic investors have purchased news outlets with the intention of backing various political forces, i.e., their motivation to invest in media was political, rather than economic, in nature. This was especially the case in Bulgaria, Romania and, to a lesser extent, in Hungary).[6] On the other hand, institutional change included the re-regulation of the supervision and funding of public broadcasters in such a way that most governments have lost their means to interfere directly with the daily management of these outlets, even though some efforts to designate politically motivated members to their boards of trustees have persisted to date. Even more importantly, institutional change has brought about a plural media landscape in which public broadcasters have lost their monopolies; of the countries studied here, dual broadcasting systems emerged in 1992 in Lithuania, in 1994 in the Czech Republic, in 1995 in Romania, in 1996 in Latvia, in 1997 in Hungary, and in 2000 in Bulgaria. As the public media were losing audiences, their presumed impact on voters' decisions declined significantly, and so did their political importance. In short, institutional change has impeded direct political interference with news reporting, and political communication needed to be adapted to this new institutional environment: political elites had to seek new methods to appeal to voters.

Secondly, the media landscapes have been transformed by technological change. Satellite broadcasting with a multitude of foreign television channels reached the region's countries in the late 1980s, and Central and Eastern Europe's 'FM revolution' in the mid-1990s brought about the launch of hundreds of local and regional radio stations. Cable television networks and the

Internet became widely available in the early and mid–2000s, especially in urban areas. These developments have enriched audiences' choice; new communication channels have proliferated, and now transmit a quantity of information that is nearly impossible to control by political and administrative means. Censorship is now a technological challenge that would imply the mobilization of a huge apparatus, as is illustrated by the example of China's Internet police. The abundance of news sites, weblogs, public discussion forums, chat rooms and e–mail lists, as well as of mobile telecommunication platforms, has eased citizens' participation in the discussion of political matters. The political elites also profit from the new channels of communication: through many of them, they can reach voters directly, i.e. without mediation by professional journalists who might want to ask uncomfortable questions.

Thirdly, news outlets and information programmes have undergone a process of tabloidization. Institutional and technological changes have resulted in a proliferation of all sorts of news media. Whereas news outlets mushroomed, the audiences have not grown in their numbers; as a result, news competition has accelerated. In an attempt to obtain, preserve and increase their audience share, news outlets, including quality newspapers and public broadcasters, have started publicizing an increasing number of popular news items. They tackle issues that are of interest to mass audiences, speak the language of the masses, and approach political issues from the perspective of 'the man of the street,' as opposed to the perspective of the intelligentsia that had once been imposed by quality newspapers and public broadcasters (cf. McNair, 1998; Schudson, 2003). Mainstream news outlets focus on S themes: sensation, scandals, stars and sports, rather than public interest stories. The 'sound bites' that politicians get to deliver their messages to the public are shorter and shorter. Political communication had to adapt to this new media environment: messages must be designed in such a way that they fit the news selection criteria that tabloid outlets set. They need to be bombastic and, preferably, visually transmissible. Otherwise, tabloid newspapers and commercial television channels, the primary sources of information for the majority of voters, would not report them.

Obviously, the region's countries have been affected differently by these changes. In particular, while the institutional setting was harmonized with European directives on paper across the region, the implementation of legislative changes, including the establishment of buffers that would protect media freedom and pluralism, was lacking in some of the countries, and especially Bulgaria and Romania, where political pressure on the media, oftentimes coupled with economic pressures, notably those exerted by domestic oligarchs, persisted more intensely than in the rest of the region's countries. Hungary is an outlier to regional processes in that a second wave of media regulation, passed in 2010, resubmitted nearly the entire media spectrum to direct political control.[7]

Changes in Political Communication

In the changing media landscapes, political elites have had to revise their media politics and political communication, and adapt them to the new media environment. This chapter suggests that a paradigm shift has occurred in many of the former communist countries: practices of old–school political propaganda have been gradually discarded, while new techniques of political marketing have emerged. For the purposes of this chapter, political propaganda will be defined as a set of systematically designed activities aimed at influencing the opinions and behaviour of large numbers of people without the use of physical force. Propaganda applies such techniques as stereotyping, the use of double standards, the substitution of names, outright lying, repetition, assertion, the pinpointing of the enemy, the appeal to authority, and is frequently associated with censorship and brainwashing (based on Brown, 1971). Political marketing will be defined as the assessment of voters' political needs and the elaboration of information campaigns that help to mobilize them in support of a political programme, party or candidate (based on Newman, 1994).

During the period of media wars in the 1990s, governments interfered directly with media freedom in an attempt to subordinate media outlets to the propaganda role ascribed to them. In particular:

They launched newspapers, radio stations and television channels of a clear pro-government bias through state–owned banks, formally independent foundations and other legal entities.

They purchased, via state–owned banks and companies, the publication rights of critical outlets, and closed them down.

They interfered with the privatization of the print press in order to help enterprises loyal to their policies obtain media ownership.

They distributed terrestrial radio and television frequencies on the basis of political considerations.

They interfered with the removal and nomination of top media personnel in state–controlled newspapers and broadcasters.

They distributed financial subsidies in the form of advertising by state–owned companies, donations by ministries, and funding by state–owned banks and media authorities on the basis of political considerations, discriminating against critical outlets.

They withheld information shedding a bad light on their policies, and provided selected media outlets on an exclusive basis with information that was to be received positively by the public.

They exerted judicial pressure on some critical journalists and outlets (e.g., Trionfi, 2001; Sükösd & Bajomi–Lázár, 2003; Bajomi–Lázár & Sükösd, 2008).

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, as part of the lately adopted political marketing strategies, political elites and their spin doctors introduced a number of communication methods that were new in the region. In particular:

They organized pseudo events such as press releases, interviews and public speeches, as well as media events such as street demonstrations on national holidays, in an attempt to set the media agenda (cf. Boorstin, 1961; Dayan & Katz, 1992).[8]

They released or leaked information in such a way that they could frame the coverage of their policies in news outlets (cf. Herman & Chomsky, [1988] 1994).

They focused their resources on publicly 'assassinating' senior characters of rival political parties (see Kiss, 2002).

They disclosed the bright side of their family lives in talk shows and entertainment magazines as part of their image construction strategies (see Jankovics, 2008).

They disseminated short, mostly visual, messages to reach audiences through tabloid newspapers and commercial television (cf. Kunczik, 2001).

They used public opinion polls and various forms of party–voter consultation extensively when designing their political programmes and campaign strategies (cf. Norris, 2000).

They applied techniques of relationship marketing and micro–targeting such as text and e–mail campaigns, interactive weblogs and community sites to reach prospective voters (see Kiss, 2006).

Country cases may obviously differ, yet there are some patterns of the paradigm shift above that seem to be recurring across the region; these changes are summarized in the table below:

Table 1

	Political propaganda (Roughly the 1990s)	**Political marketing (Roughly the 2000s)**
Method	Media capture	Media manipulation
Position	leading public opinion	following public opinion
Structure	unified message	diversified messages
Strategy	suppressing negative voices	creating positive image
Channel	public media, quality press	commercial media, tabloid press
Ideology	seeking ideological hegemony	acknowledging ideological pluralism
Dissemination Model	top–down campaigns communication–as–transmission	grass–root campaigns communication–as–ritual

The changes summarized in the table above can be specified as follows:

Rather than capturing independent media outlets, political elites today attempt to manipulate them. In particular, they seek to influence journalists' perception of newsworthiness when planning political communication and action in such a way that their public occurrences fit news selection criteria. Spin-doctors, aware of the mechanisms of news production, take into consideration the media's foreseeable reactions when designing political campaigns.

Rather than leading public opinion, political elites follow it. Public opinion is monitored, especially during election campaigns. Prospective voters are invited to take part in the elaboration of their rhetoric and policies. Political messages are tested and tried with audiences before they are publicly released.

Rather than delivering one and the same message to all target groups, political elites today appeal to voters' different groups with diversified messages, trying to give everybody what they want to hear.

Rather than suppressing critical voices and outlets, political elites attempt to enhance a positive coverage. Critical investigative reporting that discloses abuses of power is published mainly in small circulation weekly magazines, and is, more often than not, ignored by those involved. Instead, political elites focus their communication on nationwide media outlets and channels of direct contact with prospective voters such as the social media.

Rather than using quality newspapers and public broadcasters whose audience share has been declining steadily over the past two decades, political elites rely more and more extensively on tabloid newspapers and commercial broadcasters with massive reach. Most notably, politicians make appearances in quiz shows, talk shows, reality shows and even soap operas on commercial television in an attempt to reach citizens with little interest in politics.

Rather than seeking ideological hegemony by imposing their own particularistic values on the entire society, political elites today acknowledge ideological hegemony, i.e., the diversity of views characteristic of modern societies.

Rather than controlling political campaigns to the full and from above, spin-doctors now often apply grass root campaign techniques, i.e., they involve prospective voters in the dissemination of their messages and in the mobilization of fellow voters.

To use the terms of Durkheimian media sociology: communication–as–transmission methods have been largely discarded, while communication–as–ritual methods are on the rise (cf. Carey, 1989; Rothenbuhler, 1998). Acts of modern political communication are deeply ritualistic in nature. Unlike political propaganda, political marketing relies on the active feedback and participation of voters in both political communication and political action. The public is offered the chance to define key political issues and values, and to form joint opinion platforms.

In other words, political communication in Central and Eastern Europe has largely been Westernized, or professionalized, while, it should be noted again, some of the old techniques of political propaganda, inherited from the pre-transformation period, have also persisted.

The methods of political marketing have evolved gradually and organically in Western Europe and in the United States of America. Norris, for example, distinguishes three successive, yet partly overlapping, phases of the development of campaign techniques in many of the old democracies. Pre-modern campaigns relied on low–budget communication strategies that were organized

mainly on the local level and based on the use of the party press, as well as such methods of interpersonal contact with voters as local rallies and door–to–door campaigning. In the United States, this period lasted from the mid–nineteenth century until the 1950s. Modern campaigns relied on higher budgets and were organized on the national level in an attempt to reach audiences through nationwide television networks. This period, when public opinion polls were of growing importance, lasted from the early 1960s until the late 1980s. And finally, high–budget postmodern campaigns focused on a multilevel dissemination of diversified messages through cable television and the Internet. This last period, in which spin-doctors came to play a key role, began in the early 1990s (Norris, 2000). For obvious reasons, no such organic development could take place in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, where free and plural political competition and media have no tradition, except for brief periods. As a result, a few years after the political transformations of 1989–1991, the techniques of premodern, modern and postmodern campaigns were adopted roughly simultaneously, and seem to have coexisted to date in the region.

When speaking of the paradigm shift defined above, some conceptual specifications may be needed. Firstly and most obviously, political propaganda and political marketing are not mutually exclusive categories; they should be seen as dominant paradigms, or the main rules to which there are exceptions, during the respective periods. For example, the government capture of public broadcasters has persisted in some countries such as Hungary and Romania, while marketing techniques are now also being deployed in these countries. Further, political parties within a country may differ: big and small, rich and poor, governing and opposition, catch–all and programmatic, unitary and factionalized, mass–based and elite–based parties may differ in their communication strategies, depending on the resources that they have access to and the constituencies they wish to appeal to.

It is also to note that, despite their differences, political propaganda and political marketing have similarities as well. Both methods of political communication mobilize significant financial resources in an attempt to reach their goals. Also, both political propaganda and political marketing rely heavily on the power of political ideologies. People have an innate desire to make order out of chaos, to understand and to categorize the world that surrounds them, and to develop political identities. Political ideologies, whose key function is to structure reality, meet this need (cf. Heywood, 2003). The political elites' messages do not focus upon 'reality' as an objective given, but on a series of subjective realities perceived through the lenses of political ideologies. As a result, political messages are simplistic and populist in nature in both propaganda and marketing campaigns.

While the paradigm shift suggested above seems to be characteristic of most countries across Central and Eastern Europe, there is no reason to believe that it should be an irreversible one. Hungary, which is an outlier to regional processes

in that the government change in 2010 generated a major backlash in the status of media freedom,[9] seems to display a clear pattern of return to the old–school methods of political propaganda (for details, see Bajomi–Lázár, forthcoming/a).

Research Methodology

While political campaigns in the former communist countries have been widely, but not extensively, studied by media analysts, little attention has been devoted to show how spin-doctors and senior politicians relate to the media. The following sections will give an overview of some of the findings of a series of interviews conducted with those designing and executing political campaigns. The research team of the Media and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe project—including Václav Štětka, Henrik Örnebring and me—has made over three hundred semi-structured interviews with media professionals, regulators, spin doctors and senior politicians in the ten former communist countries that have joined the European Union since 2004. Of these interviews, forty-five will be analyzed here. These were conducted with political communicators (mostly former journalists and/or politicians) and active party politicians in two Central European countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary), two South–East European countries (Bulgaria, Romania) and two North–East European countries (Latvia, Lithuania) between April and October 2011. Among other things, the interviews aimed at gaining a better understanding of the following issues:

What do politicians think of the media's influence on public opinion and voting behaviour?

Do politicians monitor public opinion before making ideological and policy choices?

Do politicians/spin doctors pretest messages before releasing them?

Do politicians attend media trainings?

Do politicians use the social media to reach voters?

Do politicians/spin doctors take advice from Western spin doctors when elaborating their communication strategies?

The interviewees have been selected in such a way that both governing and opposition party spin-doctors and politicians are represented, including major as well as minor political forces, and of a variety of ideological stances. The interviews have been anonymised; for this reason, only the country of origin will be indicated when quotations are used. (It should be noted that the interviews, whose lengths varied between thirty minutes and two hours, covered a wide range of issues, not just political communication.)

Findings

Even the superficial observer may note politicians' preoccupation with the media, while at the same time media effects research and reception studies suggest that the impact of mass communication tends to be overestimated, and other factors such as voters' personal experiences and interpersonal communication are widely believed to be less influential than they actually are (e.g., Lazarsfeld et al., 1948; Klapper, 1960; Hall, 1974; Morley, 1992). The dissonance between common wisdom and empirical findings raises the question: how much influence, in the politicians' view, do the media have on public opinion and voting behaviour? Below are some answers that occur to be typical of many politicians:

'The media's role cannot be overestimated. It is the strongest among the various agents that shape public opinion.' (Hungary)

'We [. . .] live in a mediatized democracy, and the various political actors who use the media [. . .] first consider what the 'mediability' of the action is.' (Hungary)

'It is a fact in the Czech Republic that the mass media have an incredible influence on the way politics is perceived by the citizens.' (Czech Republic)

'At least one third of people really vote under the influence of the mass media.' (Lithuania, referring to the local Russian population)

When answering a control question ('Do people believe the media?'), politicians confirmed that the media, in their views, had people's trust.[10] As one of them put it:

'The viewers and readers have a kind of over-trust in media.' (Lithuania)

Of all media outlets, television is still believed to be the most influential:

'The role of media is huge. And especially the role of television.' (Lithuania)

'Viewers do not decide rationally, but on the basis of their impressions.' (Hungary)

However, for new and small parties, which the traditional media largely ignore or treat unfavorably, the Internet is of a growing significance. This seems to be the case with the Freedom and Solidarity Party in Slovakia and the Green Party in the Czech Republic, among other political forces.

At the same time, some politicians were more prudent, or ambivalent, when asked about the media's impact:

'I believe that my party, like any political party, overestimates the role of the media.' (Romania)

'The relationship between the press and people's behaviour is often unpredictable. [. . .] It is indeed very difficult for the media to influence politics in line with their intentions. [. . .] Often these attempts turn against them, and their outcome might be very different from what was intended.' (Czech Republic)

This prudence or ambivalence could also be observed when politicians were asked about whether the government capture of public broadcasters pays or not.

Some Czech, Hungarian and Lithuanian politicians admitted that media capture may actually have a boomerang effect in that it can actually alienate voters:

'I don't think [government control over public broadcasters] pays. Even in totalitarian systems, where the regime tries to control the Internet, such attempts are not efficient for very long. Besides, the past twenty years are evidence that those who submit the public service media to tight government control will lose the next elections.' (Hungary)

'I would say that pro-government propaganda could pay, had it been done in a smart way. The invasion of the public service media, however, is without doubt counterproductive.' (Hungary)

'I believe [the political control of public broadcasters] doesn't pay.' (Czech Republic)

'[Attempts to control public broadcasters can] backfire very easily. The political parties observe this very cautiously.' (Lithuania)

Several of the interviewees suggested that the media have a direct impact not only on public opinion but on the political process and on politicians' personal careers as well:

'Of course media are important, very important players, they are shaping politics' (Latvia)

'A newspaper can kill a fly and a politician.' (Bulgaria)

'Part of the media [are] of extreme toxicity. [. . .] There is unsubstantiated aggression and distortion of truth, absolutely clearly.' (Romania)

'The climate in general of the media is the climate of war, with insinuations, different mixtures of real scandals and fake ones, and the arena of media have become some kind of place for psychological warfare where you fight your opponents, not just trying to advertise how good you are yourself, but also to buy fake stories, humiliating stories about your opponents.' (Lithuania, emphasis added).

It is important to note that, in addition to the media's perceived influence on public opinion, the political process and politicians' careers, there might be other reasons why politicians exert pressure on media outlets, and especially public broadcasters. The capture of the state media allows them to control the resources that the media have, including production funds, infrastructure, and well–paying positions, which they can use for party building, organization, and patronage; for example, jobs in the media and the media authority can be allocated to party supporters in exchange for past and future services (Bajomi–Lázár, forthcoming/b).

The interviews also showed that most politicians and parties rely on opinion surveys, especially during election campaigns. Surveys are usually commissioned to professional research institutes. Their reliability, however, is an issue in some countries such as Bulgaria and Romania, where it is a widely held view by both politicians and spin-doctors that survey data and findings are manipulated.

Interestingly, the Labour Party in Lithuania, established by a local businessman, keeps an eye on survey results to such an extent that even its name is

based on survey findings: this is the name and profile that there has been a public demand for. Some of our interviewees, for example the representative of the Bulgarian Ataka Party, mentioned that they also used focus group research to pretest messages. In Hungary, the Fidesz Party uses direct mail surveys to monitor public opinion. In the Czech Republic, some of the senior politicians go out every now and then with voters to discuss current issues over a beer. And, of course, press leaks are also widely used across the region to see how the public would react to new policy ideas.

Importantly, though, most politicians observe survey results to a certain extent only, and do not base their decisions solely on them. Different parties display different patterns in this respect. Not very surprisingly, populist parties rely more heavily on survey findings than programmatic parties do. (The number of programmatic parties seems to be decreasing across the region, while that of populist ones appears to be increasing. In other words, there may be a growing number of populist, or pragmatic, or cross–over, parties that change their positions 'with the wind', that is, with public opinion–especially in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania.) Small parties keep an eye on their own constituencies only (as the examples of the late Free Democrats' Alliance in Hungary and of the Ataka Party in Bulgaria show), whereas big ones follow more closely the will of the general population.

Not only are messages tested via opinion polls and occasionally via focus group research, but politicians also keep an eye on feedback from various social groups. Party programmes are elaborated in close collaboration with different organizations gathering prospective voters, including party members among whom draft programmes are circulated through various channels, as well as stakeholders such as nongovernmental and professional organizations, including trade unions that party officials consult with on a more or less regular basis. Politicians and parties use different channels when communicating with various target groups. In particular,

- communication with party members is still dominated by traditional methods such as the official party newspaper, internal flyers, face–to–face meetings and telephone calls to local party officials, but it increasingly relies on such new channels as the party webpage, electronic newsletters and mailing lists;
- party sympathizers are addressed via nonofficial party newspapers and the social media (Twitter, Facebook, and its local versions);
- other voters are mainly addressed via television (including talk shows, quiz shows, reality shows and soap operas).

It is to note that parties that are the leading forces in coalition governments have different organizational units to take care of government and of party communication, even though the division line between the two is often blurred (as it is in Hungary, for example).

Politicians' and parties' positions define their communication strategies. Young and small parties with weak organizational structures and limited resources often struggle with internal communication. And, especially when in opposition, they find it difficult to get media attention. Extreme right parties are an exception to this rule and seem to intentionally break societal taboos in order to make the news (as do the Movement for a Better Hungary Party and the Ataka Party in Bulgaria). Further, small and opposition parties usually do not have the money to commission opinion polls (such is the case of Politics Can Be Different in Hungary), or not on a regular basis (as is demonstrated by the cases of the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania and of the Green Party in the Czech Republic).

Speaking of the social media, the interviews showed that many of the senior politicians have either Facebook profiles or Weblogs, which they primarily use to reach young urban audiences. The way the social media are used is usually not decided centrally; most often it is politicians themselves who make their posts as they see fit. Top politicians, such as prime ministers, are an exception to this rule as their posts are managed by their communication teams. At the same time, the interviews revealed a certain deal of skepticism with regard to the use of this communication channel. As one politician put it:

'New media [are] a communication channel for young people, but they never go to vote.' (Lithuania)

Some interviewees have also noted that the use of the social media may backfire, as it attracts hostile comments. The use of the social media may also imply difficulties for governing parties and politicians:

'When you create a Facebook profile, you make it possible for anybody to start communicating with you, in an informal way. And if you want it to work, you have to answer in an informal way, too. But the Ministry has no informal information!' (Czech Republic)

Some interviewees have mentioned that Facebook may bring more profit to opposition forces than to governing ones, because of its mobilizing impact; it is an ideal means to organize demonstrations and flash mobs in order to protest against government policies. For example, the press freedom rallies in Budapest in March and October 2011[11] and the Sofia protests in September 2011 after the Katunitsa murder[12] were to a large degree organized via Facebook.

Spin-doctors stressed that they also listen to feedback from journalists. They start their working day reading the press and, every now and then, they socially meet with journalists whom they seek to maintain good personal contacts with. As one spin-doctor put it,

'I also got familiar with the 'demand'–what the journalists want to know. Therefore I try to adjust our service to this perceived demand, so the journalists don't get things from us which they don't get to use.' (Czech Republic)

In a similar vein, all politicians interviewed reported that members of parliament attend media trainings every now and then, during which they are taught how they should communicate with journalists. Importantly, some mentioned that spin-doctors from western countries also take part in the elaboration of campaign strategies and, occasionally, in trainings. In particular, the names of Jacques Séguéla (Bulgaria) and Ron Werber (Hungary, Romania) were men-

tioned. One spin-doctor has noted the businesslike nature of the relationship between communication advisers and political forces:

'What is the most funny thing is that some of [the United States–based communication consultancy companies] worked in a campaign for one party, and then in another campaign for another party—for the Social Democrats in 2004, for the Liberals in 2008, and for [President] Băsescu in 2009.' (Romania)

Trainings are usually held at the beginning of parliamentary mandates and before election campaigns.

Concluding Remarks

Most politicians still believe that the media are an efficient means to influence public opinion and voting behaviour, yet they tend to rely on the refined techniques of political marketing, rather than the rudimentary methods of political propaganda—this is how the major findings of the interviews can be summarised, in line with the proposition that political communication has been largely Westernized in the former communist countries. Political rhetoric and practice are increasingly based on feedback and, as a general rule, political elites try to follow, rather than lead, public opinion; spin doctors disseminate diversified messages through different channels to different target groups in an attempt to appeal to voters. Political elites now attempt to manipulate, rather than capture the media.

This paradigm shift in political communication is connected with the fact that the intensity of political pressure exerted on the media has decreased in Central and Eastern Europe, and the status of media freedom has improved since the early post-transformation period. Yet, despite similarities, the region's countries also display major differences in terms of both political communication and media freedom. While in Bulgaria, Romania and, more recently, Hungary, the status of media freedom is quite poor and direct political pressure on the media is a daily practice, the Czech Republic, Latvia and Lithuania perform better in terms of media freedom, and political pressure is less marked.

Notes

1. The deficit of media freedom will be defined as the recurring prevention by pressure of the publication of information detrimental to individual politicians and political groups in order to hinder their control by the electorate.

2. See the Freedom House's Freedom of the Press Historical Data at http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=274 (last accessed on October 24, 2011).

3. The questions assess the constitutional guarantees of free speech, the independence of the judiciary, the independence of media authorities, government's control over information, access to information, self–censorship, state ownership, the transparency and concentration of private media, the state's role in allocating advertising revenues and subsidies, etc. For a detailed description of the Freedom House research methodology, see http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=350&ana_page=348&year=2008 (last accessed on October 24, 2011).

4. The consolidation of media freedom can be defined as the process that aims at completing the behavioral and attitudinal foundations of media freedom. Thus the concept denotes the continuous marginalization of behaviour patterns incompatible with the baseline of media freedom and the stabilization of those in harmony with it. This is not to suggest that there can be no deviations from media freedom in a democratic system, but to say that media freedom must be the main rule, while the institutions, behaviour patterns and attitudes that challenge the freedom of the media are widely considered undemocratic and are marginalized accordingly.

5. The manuscript was submitted in November 2011.

6. See the Media and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe project's country case studies at http://mde.politics.ox.ac.uk/index.php/publications (last accessed on October 24, 2011).

7. See the Media and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe project's country case studies at http://mde.politics.ox.ac.uk/index.php/publications (last accessed on October 24, 2011).

8. Following Max Weber's theory, it is largely held that power actually is the attribution of power: one has power when people accept his or her authority. Thus power and its representation are closely interrelated. It is for this reason that pseudo-events and media events may work as self–fulfilling prophecies; in order to become big, one must look big (cf. Boorstin, 1961).

9. Hungary's press freedom index fell seven points on a hundred–point scale according to Freedom House's annual press freedom report: for the year 2009, Hungary received twenty-three points; for the year 2010, thirty points; see http://www.freedomhouse.org/images/File/fop/2011/FOTP2011GlobalRegionalTables.pdf (last accessed on October 24, 2011).

10. Note that this is not the case. As a worldwide survey conducted by Gallup in 2006 and 2007 has shown, public trust in the media is quite low in both Western and Central and Eastern Europe, see http://www.gallup.com/poll/103300/Quality–Integrity–Worlds–Media–Questioned.aspx?version=print (last accessed on November 2, 2011).

11. See http://www.eubusiness.com/news–eu/hungary–media.93mand, http://thecontrarianhungarian.wordpress.com/2011/10/05/hungarian–government–to–block–protest/ (last accessed on October 31, 2011).

12. See http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=132481 and http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=132480 (last accessed on October 31, 2011).

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Chapter 6

The Intersection of Two Revolutions: The Role of New Media in the Development of Post–Socialist Europe in the First Twenty Years

John Parrish–Sprowl

In the period from 1989 to the present two great global revolutions, one political and the other technological have changed the global environment in huge, transformative ways. The first revolution was the collapse of the Communist governments from the Soviet Union to those across Eastern and Central Europe. Among other changes emanating from this revolution were seismic shifts in patterns of global trade, national political systems, and international political structures. The second revolution, technological in nature, created great changes in communication and information management tools, or new media, facilitating historic shifts in the nature of connectedness between people from all corners of the earth. In the countries of post–Communist Europe we can observe the reflexive relationship between these two revolutions and how they have created political and cultural changes profoundly breaking many ties with the past, while concomitantly setting the stage for a different, more globally integrated future.

This chapter explores these changes through a brief discussion of each revolution with a specific focus on the development and penetration of new media, a term often used to describe digitally based media. This will be followed by some thoughts about the implications for the near and long–term future in this region

with respect to cultural, political, and economic development.

The Great Geopolitical Revolution

In a century filled with global war as well as large number of other conflicts, both hot and cold, perhaps no greater geopolitical shift occurred than that resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union. Not only was the USSR broken up into multiple countries, the nations of Central Europe were free from Soviet domination and the yoke of communism for the first time since the end of the World War II. Throughout the Western world these changes were celebrated as they were in most of the countries directly affected. Although many outside observers, as well as many among the populations of the post–Communist countries, grossly underestimated the difficulty in effecting the transformation to both political and economic structures and policies, no one doubted that much needed to be accomplished to bring these countries up to Western standards of governmental and commercial performance. Amongst the myriad of decisions and changes that governments had to make to regulatory policies were those related to the development of a more modern, shared private/public media system. As Dragomir (2003, p. 1) notes, quoting Welsa: "When the Polish anticommunist Lech Walesa said in 1993 that, 'the level and state of the mass media determine the development of democracy' few put much value on his remark. A decade later, however, Walesa's comment has proven prescient." However, Walesa, along with most others, did not anticipate the rapid development and spread of new media that would add additional strength to his observation.

During the Communist era private media and its attending industries, such as advertising, were essentially nonexistent. In addition, only a very few citizens even had a telephone in their residence, much less a computer. Access to the Internet, or even knowledge of the Internet, among the public was also nearly nonexistent. A very small number of people at some universities along with a few political elites could access e–mail on a highly limited basis. While the political circumstances changed with what some called the Velvet Revolution—such that people could purchase computers, phones, and other equipment supporting new media—the reality in almost every post–Communist country was that almost no one could afford to buy. Even if a person did develop the economic wherewithal to obtain a computer, the infrastructure was not set up in much of any place to allow a hookup to the Internet.

With one important exception, the infrastructure and economic changes necessary to facilitate access to new media have been and continue to be slow to evolve. The rate of change, in almost every post–Communist country, has been and continues to be highly correlated with the degree to which democratic reforms have taken hold, along with the pace at which market reforms have taken place. While the World Bank (2002) categorized post–Communist countries

based on a four–category schemata, Jakubowicz (2005) notes that is easier to simply identify two groups: Type A (e.g., Czech Republic, Slovenia, Hungary, Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia) and Type B countries (e.g., Armenia, Albania, Georgia, Macedonia, Azerbaijan, Belarus). To the present day, many who live in Type B countries, the ones that have been slow to reform or simply have not, still have highly limited access to new media either for infrastructure, personal economic reasons, or both. At the more progressive end of the spectrum, in Type A countries such as Poland, Internet cafés grew rapidly in numbers in the first part of the twenty-first century and are now in gradual decline as more people have Internet access in their home, obviating the need to go to the café.

The important exception in access is that of mobile telephony. Some small geographic areas not withstanding, in almost every locale in post–Communist Europe one can observe high rates of mobile phone ownership and use. Because the infrastructure for this technology was faster, easier, and ultimately less expensive to develop than landline–based capacity, mobile phone usage quickly spread across the region. This phenomenon is often referred to as "leapfrogging" because new technology has been put in place without a progression through the development of older technology. Although the capacity to own and use this technology has primarily been used for personal conversation and text messaging, it sets the stage for the technological revolution to continue to blossom. Without the political and economic changes that resulted from the collapse of communism, both old and new media would be much further behind the West in development due to both the political urge to resist democratizing access and because the West is moving forward so rapidly.

Many observers have noted that the state of media in post–Communist Europe is much stronger than it was in 1989. They, of course, are primarily referring to traditional media. Yet, even as governments began to democratize, the political elites still had a strong desire to control electronic, and to a lesser extent print, media outlets. While print media expanded rapidly initially, only to scale back as the economic realities of supporting such publications set in, electronic media were much slower to evolve. Most of the private electronic media were financed and controlled by sources from outside of the post–Communist nations. In creating new, post–Communist media regulation for both electronic and print media, however, for the most part countries did not write laws that would take into account the effects of digital convergence. In fact, the same could be said for the regulatory structures in many Western countries as well. While such regulations made sense in the short term, over time they will not keep pace with the development of digital advances and the resulting new media that will dominate the global landscape. For example, all countries will need to deal with the issues of intellectual property rights, changing media industry structure reflective of the new technologies, and issues of content regulation such as the access to pornography.

The Technological Revolution

Political and economic systems transformations in and of themselves provide a rate of change that can be difficult for any nation, organization, or individual to manage, much less when those changes occur at a juncture in history when a global technological revolution is under way. The development of computers in general, and the Internet more specifically, has initiated the process of completely transforming the media in almost every nation around the world. Up until the post–Communist period, nations in East and Central Europe were being largely passed by. However, once the political and economic revolutions took place, the technological changes in media began to spread across the region, initially in Type A countries, and more recently in many of the Type B countries. As noted earlier, the most obvious manifestation of this has been in mobile telephony. However, just as in the West, both traditional and new media will change and continue to change in all of post–Communist Europe.

Analyzing the media of any region of the world, or even any nation, is confounded by the constant change in media systems due to the advent of digital technologies. The rate of change and the transformative nature of digitization practically assure that each article or book that assesses the state of development is out of date by the time it is published. Because technology provides the platform for any media system, be it print, broadcast, or digital, we cannot discuss a media system without attending to the means of delivery. Globally, all media systems are transforming into digital–based media systems, albeit at radically differing rates.

A digital–based system creates a completely new media system, not only because it creates new media streams, but also because it alters the nature and relationship, both of and between, older media. Digital media not only add new streams of media, such as the Internet, they also update the technological basis for more traditional media, both electronic and print. Essentially all media are rapidly moving into a digital stream such that they can enter the home (or wherever) all in the same way. Thus they become equivalent choices, technologically speaking. So radio, television, film, and traditional print as mediums and as industries become a subset of the same thing, digital information and entertainment providers. In addition, we add new media streams; notable examples include web pages, blogs, gaming, and social networking sites.

As a consequence, traditional print circulation tends to decline with increased Internet access by the populace. This is most obvious in the United States where traditional print media has become largely unprofitable. Many newspapers in the United States would fold were it not for online revenues. In addition, traditional broadcast network audience share is in gradual decline as well, sharing the viewers with digital channels, including such fare as cable television networks and online video games. While traditional broadcast and print are in decline in the United States, digital locations such as YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, etc., are expanding at a prodigious rate. This is happening in Europe and the rest of the world as well. Cable outlets such as CNN International and MTV are everywhere. One can enter an Internet café in almost any country and see people playing online games. Although the move to digital media systems varies in each nation, it will continue to replace traditional media around the world because ultimately it is less expensive and more expansive.

Each of the post–Communist nations is moving towards total digitization at different rates, depending on economic development and political factors. Type A countries began slowly, but the paces moves a bit faster with each passing year. Type B countries vary from those who have seen little penetration, such as Belarus, to those nations who, with external assistance, are beginning to move forward more rapidly than in previous years. Macedonia, for example, is working on developing a totally wireless capable nation through assistance provided by the United States. The pace of penetration affects the rate of cultural accommodation of globally homogenized artifacts that creep into the indigenous culture. For example, fashion, food, music, sport, entertainment content, transportation, shopping, and lifestyle patterns (such as weekend) begin to alter culture in large part due to a large volume of media content from multiple sources.

Post–Communist Europe at the Intersection

Twenty years of governmental changes and market activity (1989–2009) have brought much change to the post–Communist world. Shaping these changes, as well as being shaped by these changes, is the technological revolution digitizing the world. The historical tendency for the political elites to make an effort to control media is being undermined by mass digitization. Indexical of this problem is the widespread violation of copyrights and media piracy throughout the post–Communist world. People routinely copy whole books, films, and music for both personal use and to sell at discount to others without regard to who owns the intellectual property. The ease with which this can be done, combined with the high portability of the product makes this very difficult to control. Much of the world wants to regulate this for commercial reasons and yet control of digital media is only marginally successful.

There is no reason to believe that the political elites in post–Communist countries will be any more capable of controlling digital media than their Western counterparts. This is especially so since governments in many post–Communist countries have had little internal incentive to enforce regulations even when developed at the behest of external forces, because the property did not originate in their nation so no revenues are lost and the theft of such property aids in local economic development. Thus digital media provide a catalyst for completing the transformation from the old order of central media control, to one that is less amenable to close management. While the impact of new media covers a broad spectrum across the region, without question, change in cultural patterns, political processes, and economic development has been and will con-

tinue to be, the result.

Cultural Patterns

One important consequence of new media is the exponential growth of a global popular culture. Music, celebrities, games, social networks, and language have converged in digital media to create a culture that is worldwide in reach and accessed constantly by a growing number of people. For example, U.S. hip–hop music and Japanese Manga are both wildly popular outside of their original country and both are primarily available to other nations in digital form. The development of this global culture does not lead to the disappearance of local cultures, but rather leads people to split their time between the two. This, in turn, creates a reflexive relationship between local and global cultures that influences and reshapes both. This is manifested both in the amount of time one devotes to each, constituting the enactment of culture, and the direct influence of the content on cultural patterns.

The influence of media content is always difficult to separate from other environmental stimuli, let alone discerning the particular impact of new media on ways of being. Certainly the ascension to the EU of a number of countries has facilitated connection with the local cultures and the larger continental and global currents. Nevertheless, it clearly presents a force in shaping cultural patterns of action, especially among the younger generation. Perhaps the largest impact on traditional ways of being is the shift of time and attention to new media away from historical means of engagement. People spend a great deal of time text messaging, listening to MP3 players, gaming on the Internet, surfing the Internet, watching programming on DVD players, as well as viewing digital channels on the television. New media captures an increasing volume of time and attention from people in post–Communist Europe, just as it has elsewhere.

How people choose to spend their time is important in shaping culture. While people had television, radio, and print in prior times, as well as during the first stages of the post–Communist era, in the second post–Communist decade a growing number are spending more time with new media. This growing diversion of time and attention to new media by its very nature reduces focus on more traditional activities. This allows old patterns of life to give way to new, reshaping the culture as people shift their way of life to accommodate new media. For example, one can observe people spending hours in an Internet café engaged in online gaming in many post–Communist countries. This is not time spent in any traditional cultural practice, but rather one that reflects a homogenized global culture. Increasingly, people from around the world, especially the young, are spending their time engaged in a digital world that is shaped quite differently than the one we have lived in up to this point. No one envisioned this as a consequence of the collapse of communism, but nonetheless, it is part of the post–Communist cultural development of nearly every country.

The consequences of attending to the content of new media by the citizens of post–Communist Europe potentially move way beyond the time spent engaged in computer–mediated communication. Unlike earlier electronic communication technologies, new media holds the choice to determine, at least to some degree, the size of the audience one wishes to engage. It can be as few as one, such as in a text or e–mail message, or as great as anyone who has access to the Internet. Real–time exposure to changes in fashion, music, food, and other aspects of consumption outside of Eastern and Central Europe have greatly influenced the post–Communist cultures in many countries. U.S. movies, and the attending cultural artifacts such as McDonald's giveaways, happen in places like Poland at the same time that they do in the North America. The more economically developed countries, with their greater Internet penetration, evidence the greatest manifestations of global culture in their social milieu. However, even in those that lag behind, such as Macedonia, the increasing connection between youth and global culture is clear.

Not only do people access movies, music, television shows, and news, they also engage in discussions with people that they otherwise would never meet or converse with if face–to–face contact were required. This intercultural communication, while virtual, offers a new dimension to culture. New media goes beyond simply raising the curtain to the world outside of the former Communist zone; it facilitates an interconnectedness that was not fully anticipated in 1989. In addition, connecting people has gone commercial with a number of sites devoted to dating and spouse hunting that fosters a number of international exchanges. Thus, new media plays a pivotal role in generating a global culture without borders, influences, and traditional patterns within cultures, and facilitates intercultural engagement. Such changes can be viewed as either positive or negative, but little doubt can be raised that those cultures indigenous to the post–Communist countries have been and will continue to be influenced through further development of new media infrastructure and broadening access.

Political Processes

During the first five years or so of post–Communism new media played almost no role in the transformation of government and political processes. The web was still in the stage of being anticipated but at that point was not functioning; in addition, many digital products that are ubiquitous today were not on the market yet or had only just entered, and almost no one in Central and Eastern Europe had the wherewithal to purchase the equipment anyway. Over the next decade and a half much has changed. A number of newspapers have developed online versions, satellite and web television, and Internet cafes are numerous and many people read and write blogs, send and receive e–mails, and participate in social networking sites.[1] In addition, many political parties have developed websites and send messages over the Internet.[2] All of this has developed in addition to the

government websites that were created to serve a number of civic functions.

While all of Europe is behind the United States in terms of the role that new media play in the political process, little reason exists to believe that many aspects of the political process will not become digitally based. Economic barriers to digital politics are in a constant state of erosion as equipment and access become less expensive along with growing personal incomes across the post–Communist countries. Once tapped in, the costs of reaching both large numbers of people and targeted audiences is inexpensive. This is why the growth of new media involvement in the political process of all of the countries has begun and why that growth will accelerate in the coming years. More importantly, once digital media penetrates a region it is difficult for political elites to absolutely gain control of the media as they have often done or tried to do in the past. This is why new media play an increasingly powerful role in shaping political process. For example, across much of the region political parties now have websites. Perhaps a more graphic example is the protest in Moldova concerning government policies and the impending parliamentary elections in April of 2009. The crowd generated for this protest was almost entirely created via Facebook and Twitter.

Economic Development

The new media has impacted the economies of the post–Communist nations in three distinct ways: online commerce, online versions and variations of traditional media, and the development of new media products. Although slow to develop, reflecting the gradual penetration of online access, business conducted via the Internet is growing. For example, both plane and train tickets from various countries can be purchased and hotel reservations can be made. Other products are available as well, either through international providers or from those developing domestically within post–Communist countries. Just as in Japan, Korea, and the United States, we can expect large growth of online commerce in the coming years, especially in the Type A countries. As banking systems become more technologically sophisticated and greater numbers of people have online access in their homes, people will find the convenience of online shopping compelling.

Traditional newspapers, along with radio and television have found their way to the web. In addition, many governments maintain news and information sites. Certainly web versions of newspapers, radio, and television stations have not yet replaced the traditional print and broadcast mediums as of yet, nor is such a change likely anytime soon. However, unless something occurs to undo the changes made, especially in Type A countries, the trend to greater new media presence combined with reduced old media influences will proceed as it has elsewhere. This will lead to shifts in employment patterns, because the work to support new media demands different skills than that of old media. This includes

all aspects of the business from aggregating capital, to production, to distribution. Many of these jobs demand higher skill levels (e.g. computer programmer, developer of creative entertainment content, social network marketer) that consequently may lead to larger average incomes in many countries.

The work of creating and maintaining new media already plays a small role in shaping the economic development of a growing number of post–Communist countries. Computer science has been a rapidly growing area of study in many countries. While the industry is still small in most countries, the numbers employed are increasing at a rapid rate. People are making a living programming, designing web pages, and managing web content. When a new university in Macedonia opened its doors in 2002 (South East European University), computer science was immediately one of the most popular majors on campus. Companies such as Microsoft, which has set up R & D facilities in Poland, are finding the abundant highly talented engineers in the region to be an attractive labor pool for their new media jobs.

Implications

During the first twenty years of post–Communism, some countries, such as Belarus, have not moved in the direction of democracy and market reforms. Others, such as those nations that have gained membership in the EU, evidence considerable progress towards the direction of joining the West economically and politically. This is not to say that substantial remnants of the Communist legacy do not remain. Yet, change has clearly been made. The new media has played a small but growing role in reshaping cultural, political, and economic development over time and is poised to continue to do so. The pace at which the post–Communist countries have developed their new media are a marker of their respective efforts to narrow the gap between themselves and their wealthier, Western counterparts. But the question remains: What are the implications for the trajectory of the development of new media in the European post–Communist countries?

First, it can be said that simply by allowing the new media in and grappling with the issues surrounding its development is, in and of itself, a significant aspect of transformation. The seeds of the Internet were already planted some two decades prior to the fall of communism. The development and subsequent spread of desktop computing across the West was already well under way by 1989. A picture of the possible future world with everyone having a networked computer was emerging once it was clear that everything would change in the coming decades, especially in the media industry. By importing the technology, the post–Communist countries were allowing in the basis for a potential radical restructuring of the media into something extremely difficult to control. The consequences for culture, politics, and economic development have only begun to emerge, but it is clear that turning back to a predigital media system, one that

is more amenable to central control, is virtually impossible.

One important consequence is the reshaping of the media industry itself. Companies such as Yahoo and Google now compete with traditional media for the time and attention of people everywhere. While traditional media have moved into a genre known as reality programming, YouTube has been created on the web and it allows for actual reality shows. For example, within the past few years *Big Brother* has been a very popular show in Poland. It is only a small leap there, as it has been in the United States, for people to begin to create their own video and to post it on the web. One reason this is highly likely is because virtually no economic barrier exists to participating in providing and viewing such fare. Since the topics for such posts are delimited (excepting certain offensive material), this has implications that go way beyond entertainment.

Governments can attempt to censor certain sites. However, as we find in China, many individuals as well as media companies are highly capable in their ability to circumvent such restrictions. So, while some control can be exerted, absolute control, or even substantial restrictions, is difficult to both monitor and enforce. It only takes a few people to download the content from a restricted site and then to e–mail it throughout the system. This process is quite common in countries that do attempt to restrict access. In addition, any enforcement often occurs way after the massive transfers have been executed and are therefore only partially effective in restricting content. This is one of the reasons music downloads are so difficult to control. The same would be true for political or any other content. Thus, while the trajectories of the penetration and development of new media are different in each country, the process that ultimately decentralizes media and makes control by the elites much more difficult has begun in every post–Communist country. In this way new media, by its very nature, pushes the transformation of society.

Exactly how new media will shape the culture, politics, and economic environment in the post–Communist countries is unclear, in large part because the widespread penetration of new media is a recent occurrence everywhere. Effectively, the generally availability of the web itself is younger than the post–Communist transformation. Consequently, it is difficult to look to the West to develop policies that have some predictable outcomes when the West itself is still in the process of new media transformation. From 2000 on, each election cycle in the United States has seen new impacts on the political process from web–based activity that is new to the system. For example, while blogs have played an increasingly import role in the United States they are not quite as influential, at least not yet, in the UK or the rest of Western Europe.

The potential for new media to impact journalistic standards in post–Communist countries is great. The question to be answered is in which direction. In most of the former Communist countries professional standards for journalists are not particularly high. Adding to this blight has been the growth of tabloid journalism. It is possible that the availability of higher–quality journalism via the web and satellite television might provide a comparison that leads to a demand for higher–quality local standards. On the other hand, the growth of amateur reporting and analysis may not only offer a counterweight to development, it could undermine the economic basis for professional journalism itself. At this time it is difficult to know how standards will evolve. In any case, new media will have some impact on the quality of journalism everywhere, including in post–Communist countries.

Even more recent than the development of the web itself is the widespread use of social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook, and Tagged, along with a number of others. Just as in the West, a growing number of people in post–Communist countries are participating in the process of making friends and connecting with a wide array of people in virtual space. The content of these sites is personal in that each person can post what he or she chooses, but also public in that anyone can access a profile. Such sites compete with old media for viewer attention in two ways; by offering the same content on demand (e.g., television shows and films) and by providing alternative sources of entertainment and information (e.g., gaming, chat rooms). In the United States, political candidates maintain profiles on sites such as Facebook, which offer yet another mechanism to connect with voters. It may be only a matter of time before social networking sites play a significant role in post–Communist politics. In the Type A countries as well as some of the Type B countries the growth of participation in these sites is escalating at a rapid rate.[3]

The potential impact of this phenomenon has begun to emerge in the past couple of years. People have opened themselves up to the possibility of meeting new friends from all over the world. They can learn about other countries and cultures more directly from participants without the filter of journalists or educators. They can ask difficult questions and get a variety of answers. New fashion and fads can more quickly move through global networks thanks to the increased level of personal interconnectedness facilitated by these sites. However, such sites also expose people to unwanted scrutiny by, among others, sexual predators, stalkers, potential employers, and, of course, law enforcement. In the United States cases of people facing sanctions for illegal behavior that has been posted on social networking sites have already occurred. In post–Communist countries, where law enforcement has not always been carried out with a concern for citizen rights, social networking sites create a different potential problem for people than in the West. While the growth of participation on such sites in post–Communist countries shows little sign of abating, the impact for society remains unclear.

Perhaps the greatest potential for increasing the future impact of new media is the introduction of smartphones into post–Communist countries. Making the web mobile has already altered new media usage patters in South Korea, the United States and other countries, a process that continues to unfold. Smart phones are both an extension of an established pattern of new media usage and at the same time transformative due to their mobility, so the spread of these devices is likely only a matter of time and economic circumstances. As the networks become upgraded (which is already happening in several countries such as Poland and Slovakia) and people trade in their old mobiles for smartphones,

the populace will be connected to the web like they never have been before. This allows people to carry access to news, entertainment such as shows and games, e–mail, blogs, advertisement, and other information in their pockets for immediate access at any time. This technological development will result in further altering the fabric of society as well as contribute to additional restructuring of the media industry. When mobile phones were introduced, in part as a way of leapfrogging old technology, it was not generally anticipated that this would ultimately lead to widespread web access portability. Such changes suggest the next twenty years could see technological transformation as great as in the past twenty.

The impact of new media at any given point is determined by the speed and depth of adoption in each country. Consequently, the trajectory of development of new media in each country is a strong indicant of level of economic development in that nation. The more penetrated the nation, the greater its ability to participate in the global economy. International commerce is highly competitive. New media are necessary to make systems more efficient, to reach customers, and to develop new sources of revenue by developing media content. Post–Communist countries who are slow to create the regulatory, technological, and educational infrastructure necessary to maintain an intensive new media society run the risk of being unable to grow their economic output. For several reasons this issue is important, not the least of which is the strong relationship between economic circumstances and political process. The most obvious, but certainly not the only, manifestation of this is the need for economic performance sufficient to participate in the EU and possibly the euro zone as well. Thus, whether the political elite, or even the general population, wants a society bound to new media or not, they are likely to be drawn into dependence anyway. This may or may not make society better, but it will make it different.

Conclusion

Once the initial euphoria wore off, the people and governments of the post–Communist countries were faced with the daunting task of transforming their political and economic systems, indeed, their entire way of life. Talking about the possibilities that change might bring and how the change process might unfold is not the same as living through it. Each country, both those that were already on the map and the newly independent states, chose wildly varying pathways to conceive their future. From the perspective of democratic reform and economic development, the first twenty post–Communist years have produced some solid successes along with some abysmal failures. There has been open warfare, ethnic cleansing, tumultuous politics, worker protests, and peaceful process. In each aspect of these activities the nature of the media system in the countries involved played an important role. As time unfolded and new media

made its way into the mix, its role has grown as well.

A defining moment in the development of the power of new media in the transformation process was the role that web–based interchanges played in the war in Kosovo. Never before in this region of the world were people able to convey so much information about the nature of the situation to so many others so quickly. This "media system" had a direct impact on the entire process. E–mails, blogs, jpeg posts, and other messages were able to do what old media could not do as effectively. This example, although a bit extreme in some ways, demonstrates the profound change that new media can and will bring to the post–Communist world. Communism still plays a residual role in most of the countries, affecting both political and economic development. This, in turn, affects both the rate of new media penetration and the level of censorship of content. At one end of the spectrum, Belarus, which has a tightly controlled political system, has very low penetration and high levels of censorship. At the other end, Poland, with a much more developed democracy and market system, has a much higher level of penetration and virtually no censorship. Democratic and economic development need still more gains to close the gap with the West. There can be little doubt that new media will play a role in the continuation of this process.

So what will the next twenty years bring? No one can know, but it seems unlikely that we will return to a world where communism reigns powerful over so many people and so many countries. We are likely to witness a continued strengthening in democratic process and economic performance, especially in those countries that have become members of the EU. The rest of the countries will range from growing development to stagnation. In each case new media penetration will probably index the functionality of both democracy and the economy. Poland, for example, has upgraded mobile networks to handle smartphones, a number of Internet cafés, a rapidly growing number of people with Internet access in the home, social networking sites in the Polish language, and large international offerings on satellite television. In addition, they have strong computer science education with programming teams frequently doing well and even winning international competitions, and a growing presence of software developers, including Microsoft. Consequently, Poland will, barring a disaster, continue to close the gap between itself and the rest of the EU (this is evidenced, in part, by the fact that Poland alone, of all of the EU countries, did not suffer recession in 2008–2011).

Russia, however, is doing well economically based on petrodollars, not solid infrastructure development. The government, for example, still uses only a minimal number of computers. They will do well economically only as long as they can sell oil at high prices, unless they join countries like Poland in developing more widespread access to new media. The same can be said for the state of democracy in Russia; at this point it does not appear that it will move quickly to foster the penetration of new media, so we should probably expect internal political and economic difficulties down the road as a result. Belarus is an example of a country that is moving even more slowly to spread the new media, reflec-

tive of their political and economic conditions. It is difficult, given this slow new media trajectory, to be optimistic about their prospects for economic and democratic development over the next twenty years.

Thus, although the post–Communist revolution is far from being a finished process, it will not completely regress to pre-1989 political and economic circumstances. While some countries, such as Belarus and Moldova, have backed off of democratic and market reforms, and countries like Ukraine teeter back and forth, most of the countries have resolutely moved away from their Communist past. The technological revolution is far from complete as well and it is not likely to regress either. As the two unfold together we can see substantial change at the intersection of the two in the post–Communist countries. Although the rest of the world experiences the collapse of communism in relation to these countries, it is directly experiencing the technological revolution along with them. This creates some kinship of experience between nations, but life at the intersection is still qualitatively different in many respects. Those outside of the post–Communist sphere would benefit from respecting those differences without condescension. Those from within need to appreciate those differences and would benefit from using those differences as a springboard for motivation to continue to create greater freedom and higher living standards. No matter what happens, however, new media will play a key role in the process of creating the future.

Notes

1. See for example http://www.onlinenewspapers.com/poland.htm, http://www.onlinenewspapers.com/czech_re.htm; and http://www.surfmusic.de/webtv/albania.html, http://www.russianInternet.com/video/.
2. http://www.apacouncil.org/polish_political_parties.php.
3. See for example http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/08/world/europe/08moldova.html?_r=5.

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Chapter 7
Digital (R)evolutions? Internet, New Media and Informed Citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe

Inka Salovaara-Moring

Introduction

The political revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe coincided with a global transformation in information technology and rapid expansion of the Internet. The new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe started their media revolutions with technological innovations that not only changed their communication structures, but also inevitably affected the transformation of economic relations and political practices, as well as the communities involved. Many states chose actively to speed up their transition to a technologically advanced society through governmental initiatives (facilitating or encouraging investment in network infrastructure) serving the introduction of the Internet and thus the development of various areas of societal life. Soon, however, market developments using the new infrastructure took their own course, and various applications of new media made their presence felt across societies.

The evolution brought on by the Internet may not have appeared so dramatic at the structural level of more stable Western media systems, where the new technology initially merely introduced a new layer on top of traditional and

still quite strong media sectors. However, in countries with dramatically shifting structures in the fields of media and media policy, such as the Central and Eastern European countries (CEE), the situation was rather different.

The historical conditions of post-socialist countries differed from their Western counterparts in vital areas. During the twentieth century many large companies in the capitalist part of the world made their fortunes by investing in the media. The reason, ultimately, was simple: the Western media were protected to a notable degree within liberal market economies. Some media markets, like newspapers, were natural monopolies, often as a result of simple geography. Others, like radio and television, were (de)regulated monopolies. In all cases, the margins for incumbents remained relatively healthy. In CEE countries before the 1990s the media were even more cosseted as part of a command-and-control system and did not function according to the market logics of supply and demand. However, in the new and open market situation, the deregulated market economy dictated the conditions and the speed of change: media policies had to be immediately adjusted to the demands of a global market. Public service broadcasting needed to be created, but otherwise lack of resources forced media systems to adopt new types of technological and organisational solutions. That impacted especially the media habits of young people, the first digital natives, and as a result the Internet became a more important source of information than in the West.

This chapter approaches social transitions and media systems by exploring the new media and political economics of online audiences in Central and Eastern Europe. By looking at the relationship between technological convergence and the economic conditions of the print media, the chapter raises the issue of the viability of 'quality' news journalism in the midst of Internet-driven change.

It is sometimes claimed that the post-Communist transition is over and that liberal democracy and capitalism have won. Still, some of the problems of post-transformation societies remain. This includes the need to improve the quality of democratic governance, create better conditions for an informed citizenry, and, through that, to support and encourage trust in democratic systems.

Who Pays for Quality Journalism? The Internet and Citizens Online

In promoting democratic values and supporting informed citizenship the media are vital for democratic systems to function. The media should act as a watchdog over abuses of power, thereby promoting accountability and transparency. They act as a civic forum for political debate, thereby facilitating informed electoral choice and encouraging participation; and as an agenda-setter for policy makers, thereby strengthening government responsiveness and transparency, and encouraging democratic governance (Norris 2007). Michael Schudson and Leonard

Downie (2009, 9) define the pivotal role of quality journalism in Democratic societies in their report *Reconstructing the American Journalism* as: 'Watchdog or accountability reporting aims to foil the arrogance of power and self-dealing rather than to advance ideology or policies. It holds government officials accountable to the legal and moral standards of public service and keeps business and professional leaders accountable to society's expectations of integrity and fairness.'

In young democracies, the news media have additional and specific tasks, making quality news journalism even more important. These include the introduction of democracy, the rule of law and constitutionalism, democratic agenda setting, the development of civil society, safeguarding new democratic institutions, the assessment of wrongdoing by old and new elites, the introduction of candidates/parties before the first free elections, democratic evaluation of the national past and contributing to national integration (see, for example, Sükösd 2000). Although there is agreement that critical and accountable news journalism is salient in vital democratic public spheres, there is no agreement about who should produce 'accountability' journalism in the new market environment where the old business models are being squeezed by commercial online media.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the business model for print media that had been fairly stable in the Western world and hence was adopted by CEE media systems, proved to be outdated (Pew Project 2009; Schudson and Downie 2009; Fenton 2009). Newspapers have traditionally received their income from two sources: their readers (who either paid by subscription or at the newsstand) and advertisers. Today, both main sources of income are drying up. The decline of newspaper readership continues and the only sector of advertising that is growing is online advertising. It is, however, unable to compensate for the loss of revenue from the classified section or due to people's migrating to free news portals. Additionally, the economic crisis of 2008-2009 hit CEE countries particularly hard, exacerbating the acute crisis facing news journalism and raising doubt as to whether the news industry could survive intact both competition from the Internet and declining readership.

In 2008–2010, theses two tendencies accelerated the decline of the print media in CEE countries. If we look at the total average circulation of paid-for dailies, a fall in readership has been the overall trend in the CEE countries, except for Romania and Lithuania.

Hungary, Latvia and Slovenia saw a two-digit drop in circulation. Circulation in Slovakia reached its high point in 2007 and 2008 and was expected to start to decline between 2009 and 2010. Lithuania is the only exception to the negative trend in circulation figures. However, a survey of media experts on Lithuania conducted by TNS Gallup in January and February 2009 revealed a trend of falsifying real circulation figures by printing press runs in excess of real demand. The owners and CEOs of the largest media outlets and houses also assessed that the overall Lithuanian advertising market would decrease by 27 percent, while the newspapers' advertising market would decrease by 30 percent (World Press Trends 2009, 594).

Table 1. Change in Total Average Circulation of Paid-For Dailies % (World Press Trends 2009)

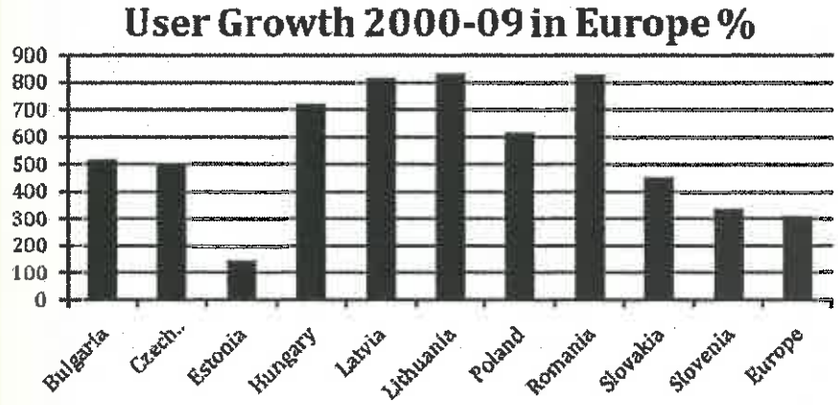
	2008/04 (%)	2008/07 (%)
Czech Republic	-6.74	-7.36
Estonia	1.56	-6.45
Hungary	-10.88	-1.58
Latvia	-35.9	-2.54
Lithuania	28.2	15.7
Poland	-8.09	-6.79
Romania	7.37	6.8
Slovakia	5.21	0
Slovenia	-23.89	-16.46

Partly this is the result of the rise of online media. In the early days of the online media in the 1990s, most newspapers discarded the idea of charging for online news. They preferred instead to make their content free to increase readership and attract advertisers who were pouring increasing amounts of money into the Internet. When newspapers started making their content available on the Internet free of charge, the first source of income dried up, as readers stopped paying for hard copies of newspapers, as they could get content free on the web. In the West, newspapers hoped to make up for the sales decline with increased advertising revenue, as the market for online adverts exploded. However, Internet advertising is still much cheaper than print advertising space. In addition, there are very few places were the pay walls for content have been tried and even fewer where they have been successful. In general, the pay wall has been functional in online portals that provide specialist information, such as business and market data—such as *Financial Times*.

The Internet's advertising share, however, has increased steadily within the region, taking its share from off-line media. The share of online advertising in total advertising by percentage increased between 2007 and 2008 in Estonia and Hungary (from 8 percent to 11 percent), Poland (from 8 percent to 10 percent), Latvia and Czech Republic (from 5 percent to 9 percent), Lithuania and Bulgaria (from 3 percent to 6 percent) and in Slovenia and Romania (from 2 percent to 3 percent). Although the online version newspapers' market share has also increased, it has not been able to make up for the losses incurred by the paper side.

When one looks at the speed of Internet penetration in the CEE region, the depth and pace of digital convergence of communication structures is striking. This is reflected in figure 1. Internet penetration growth has been extremely fast in Romania, Lithuania and Latvia (+<800 percent) followed by Hungary (+721 percent), where the number of users has almost doubled every year. Every country has reached the Internet penetration level where local service providers and media have started to develop services in local languages.

Figure 1. Internet User Growth in Europe between 2000 and 2009 (%)

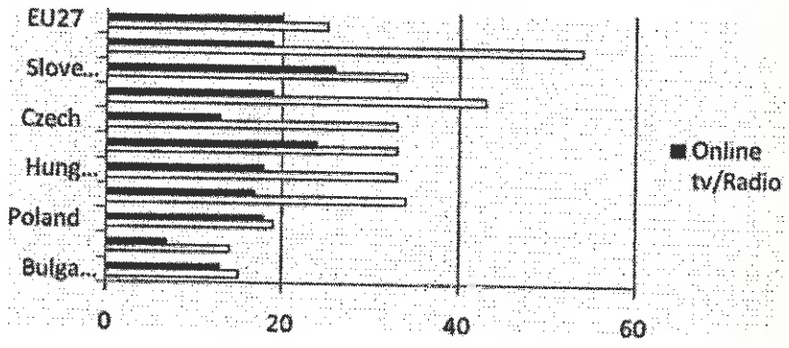


The Internet and especially broadband penetration are good indicators in predicting business interest in developing media and audiovisual services for audiences, as well as for the take-up of these services. The average European level of Internet penetration (53 percent) has now been reached in most Central and Eastern European countries. Overall Internet penetration in Estonia (68.3 percent), Latvia (61.4 percent), Lithuania (59.2 percent), Slovakia (65.3 percent), Slovenia (64.8 percent), Hungary (59.3 percent), and Czech Republic (59 percent) are beyond the European average, when all European countries are included. Only Poland (52 percent), Romania (33.4 percent) and Bulgaria (36.7 percent) are lagging behind.

As Internet penetration has steadily increased within the region, more people have started to use online media as one of their main information sources. The degree of online media consumption in the CEE countries shown in figure 2 indicates that citizens have embraced the chance to go online.

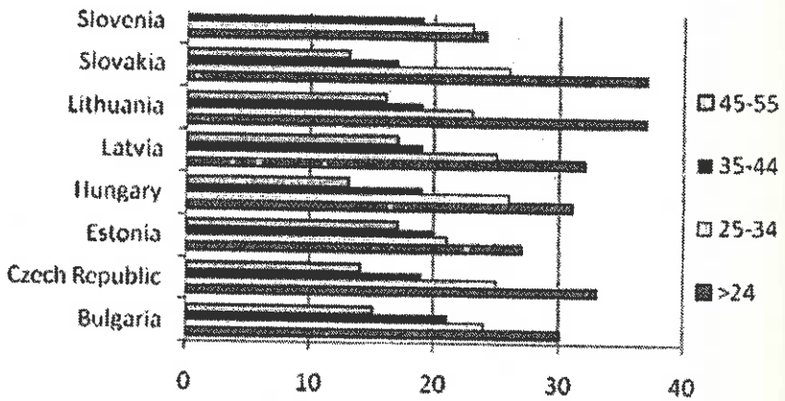
Online news and magazine consumption in the new EU member states is more intensive than in Western European countries. Only in Poland, Romania and Bulgaria is online news consumption below the EU27 average. Online television and radio consumption has, however, increased slowly, mainly because broadband penetration (making possible faster data volume transfer needed for audiovisual material) is still low in many countries within the region.

Figure 2. Percent of Population Reading Online Newspapers/Magazines and Watching Web TV or Listening to Web Radio (Source: Eurostat 2009)



In addition to the fast social transformation of media usage, CEE countries have witnessed the rise of the first generation of 'digital natives.' It is also the first free generation in the post-socialist countries. When looking at online media audiences in CEE countries (see figure 3), the youngest users are the largest group of Internet users. Indeed, younger age groups dominate the overall online population in CEE countries.

Figure 3. Online Population in CEE Countries (Gemius Audience 2009)



In every CEE country, the under-twenty-four years age group is the biggest group of Internet users, ranging from a 37 percent share in Slovakia and Lithuania to 24 percent in Slovenia. In many countries, the two biggest categories (under twenty-four years old and twenty-five to thirty-four years old) make up

close to 60 percent of all Internet users in their respective societies (Gemius Audience 2009). This rather larger online group of under-thirty-four-year-olds certainly has different media usage habits than their parents. Hence media businesses within the region are now following the preferences and media consumption of this group as they give the clearest indication how online/off-line media consumption patterns will change in the future. This has resulted in citizens in the Central and Eastern European countries using particular online media sources, prompting very specific changes to media landscapes—with some winners and some losers.

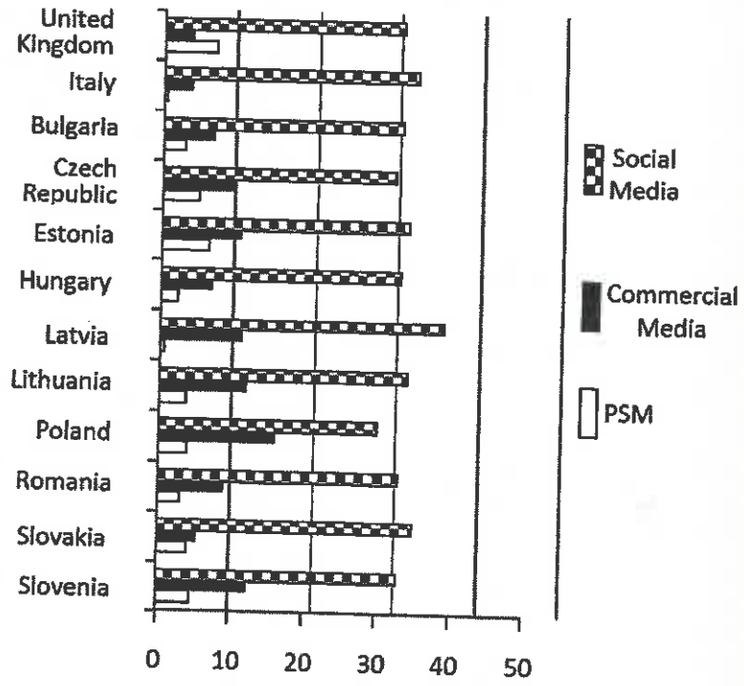
The Winners and the Losers of Online Landscapes

Traditionally, the print media have been considered as the main vehicle for democratic deliberation and 'accountability' journalism. This is simply because print media offer more space for longer and more detailed accounts, given that they are less affected by time and space constraints than television news. Broadcast news is short, the average length of television news story being ninety seconds, and lacks the space and time for contextualisation or giving background to events. The Internet does not suffer the same space constraints and enjoys multimedia options—print, video, audio and interactive graphics—to enable journalists to tell more nuanced stories and create space and time for accountability journalism.

Especially the digital platforms of public service media (PSM) broadcasters have be seen as promising extensions in which to serve the public better, expand the parent organizations' democratic remit and offer more background material and news analysis. Firstly, the remit of public service media includes the obligation to serve informed citizenship. Secondly, their digital platforms in many CEE countries already offer easy and free accessibility through programme streaming. This enables users either to follow programmes through Internet in real time or using e-archives as on-demand services. Thirdly, these services of PSM have made it possible to customise and reuse material that has been funded by the taxpayer and hence enhanced the accountability of the PSM. Some of the public service companies offer services that also include possibilities of interactivity and participation.

However, do the online audiences in the CEE countries migrate to the digital platforms of PSM when they consume their news online? Figure 4 displays the average minutes of daily online use for (1) public service media, (2) online commercial media, and (3) social media.

Figure 4. Average Minutes of Daily Internet Use for Social Media, Commercial Media and PSB (Alexa Internet Company, March 2010)



Unfortunately CEE online audiences spend relatively little time on PSM web pages, a feature reflected by their Western European counterparts. There are some exceptions, such as, for example, Estonian PSM that at six minutes matches the BBC's online audience. However, the average time spent on the digital platforms of CEE PSMs is only around three minutes. Yet in Italy visitors spend less than one minute on RAI's website, despite its fairly developed digital platform-usage on a par with that in Latvia and Romania. Moreover, in common with online audiences across Europe and North America, CEE online audiences conform to the global tendency of spending over half an hour per day in social media such as Facebook (or local equivalents).

Instead of relying chiefly on PSM websites, people go to free news portals or commercial media's online versions to meet their needs. News portals are not necessarily always the online versions of newspapers, but free sites offering entertainment, soft news, interactive features and videos. Users spend approximately twelve minutes on the sites of the news portals. One of the big attractions of these sites is that they are extremely interactive, mixing up entertainment, social media and short news. As such they are not, however, emphasising 'quality' news journalism as their main product.

Sex, Lies and Videotapes? News Portals as News Sources

News portals are often politically oriented or tied to local businesses. They are about sex, crime and gossip—that is their product. They are considered to be more open and liberal than other media. (Lithuanian head of news agency, PSM board member).

The rise and the popularity of news portals has been one of the main features of CEE digital media landscapes. One reason for their popularity has been, first and most obviously, the fact that news portals are more *interactive*, where previously news and content consumption in general was passive. Within the new world of media users are encouraged to rate, rank, comment on, review and respond. Secondly, online portals are increasingly attracting the public instead of being pushed at it (e.g., commercial platforms like Baltic *Delfi news portal* have digital radio stations, blogs, entertainments sections, classifieds and social media applications all on one portal). Their users are people who decide individually or collectively what to consume or to scan online, and what to reject. Thirdly, online media portals are *microchunked*, rather than monolithic. Through blogs people can read posts and amid audio content the audience can watch microchunked videos. There is also a new generation growing up that is familiar with various forms of social media and Internet information sources. They all apply different logics in relation to users/citizens than do traditional media.

Table 2 shows the top five news portals in five Central and Eastern European countries, offering a picture of the reach and popularity of the online news sources.

In most cases, the most popular news portals are more than online versions of the newspapers; they are commercial horizontal portal projects offering many types of services. The online portals in Estonia enjoy permanently high popularity ratings. The *Postimees* portal is an online version of the biggest Estonian broadsheet and takes second position within the presented ranking. It steadily improved its position by increasing its reach level from 32 percent in January 2006 to almost 49 percent in January 2009. Sloleht.ee is the online version of the Estonian tabloid *Ohtuleht.* The leader in Estonia and Lithuania (also in Latvia) is *Delfi*, a news portal that combines the features of both a horizontal portal and a typical news platform. It provides not only news (often taken from other news sources), but also 'lifestyle' content. Delfi.lt has multimedia content and interactive functionalities, offering online video (Delfi TV), and radio, as well as photo hosting tools, blogging platform, chat and an e-mail service.

Table 2. Top 5 News Portals in Estonia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Hungary[1] (newspaper online versions in bold and tabloid online version marked with an asterisk)

Top 5 News Portals	Number of real users	Page views per user	Average time per user	Reach
	Estonia			
Delfi.ee	485 434	180	04:03	63%
Postimees.ee	371 807	105	02:59	48%
Sloleht.ee*	288 033	100	01:40	38%
Elu24.ee	264 657	38	00:46	34%
Everyday.com	171 135	30	00:54	22%
	Lithuania			
Delfi.lt	917 008	99	02:52	63%
Lrytas.lt	687 352	64	01:32	48%
Alfa.lt	537 787	24	00:39	37%
Zebra.lt	440 466	30	00:33	30%
Diena. lt	411 108	12	00:12	28%
	Bulgaria			
Dir.bg	1 488 810	77	01:22	50%
Start.bg	970 012	8	00:12	33%
Btv.bg	668 288	19	00:17	22%
Dnevnik.bg	590 192	11	00:15	20%
Dnes.bg	541 558	26	00:37	18%
	Czech Rep			
Seznam.cz	4 160 510	624	19:08	83%
novinky.cz	2 811 653	75	01:50	56%
idnes.cz*	2 760 044	105	01:51	55%
centrum.cz*	2 525 140	176	03:22	51%
super.cz*	2 051 261	61	00:50	41%
	Hungary			
startlap.hu	2 372 714	47	01:59	64%
origo.hu	1 676 935	37	02:22	45%
index.hu	1 280 832	61	04:04	35%
nlc.hu	902 694	35	00:37	25%
msn.com	875 383	25	01:14	24%

An important player among Lithuanian portals is the site of the daily Lithuanian newspaper *Lietuvos rytas*. This portal has a news-oriented profile, but also contains video content, a forum, blog, information about events in Lithuania and a section dedicated to a traditional TV channel (also owned by the Lietuvos rytas media group). Third in popularity is Alfa.lt, a typical news-publishing site, but equipped with a video section and a forum. It was launched in 2006 as a portal serving audiences of different ages and interests, aiming to inform them through easily digestible but reliable news. Zebra. lt is an entertainment portal, offering news, leisure time information (television schedules, event guides, etc.) as well as entertainment services such as video, games, blogs, online radio or tools to create individual web pages.

Diena.lt, another online newspaper portal, is the online version of Diena newspaper. This portal is steadily growing its market position. Diena.lt is a platform that also connects the three sub-domains of regional newspapers (kauno.diena.lt, klaipeda.diena.lt, vilniaus.diena.lt), including news and articles from local newspapers. Moreover, they also have a forum, a directory of companies, advertisements and blogs. A similar profile can be found in balsas.lt (28 percent reach), a portal that apart from the news contains also has sections dedicated to many kinds of advertisements, complaints, video content, money, currency and games.

The first in the Bulgarian portal landscape—dir.bg—was founded in April 1998 and since then has been the dominant player by providing news, catalogues, entertainment, discussion forums, classified advertisements and communication tools. Start.bg is an online catalogue, and below that is btv.bg that provides news and information on interesting television shows. Dnevnik.bg and dnes.bg are both news portals and online versions of their respective newspapers. According to a Gemius study (Pelc et al. 2009), the horizontal portal market in Bulgaria is not very well developed and apart from the services presented above, there were at the time no other local websites of this kind.

According to local expert opinion, online portals spearheaded Internet growth in the Czech Republic and they still lead the country's online market. The first position regarding reach is held consistently by seznam.cz (83 percent), which is a vertical portal collecting different services on its webpage. It also dominates in terms of the average time spent monthly per user (over nineteen hours). Other important sites include: novinky.cz, idnes.cz and super.cz, online daily tabloids produced in cooperation with seznam.cz. Furthermore, in 2009 several print media started their own online operations, but it was doubtful if they would be successful in attacking the primacy of top local and regional news portals.

In Hungary, an interesting website that differs from the popular portals most usually found in CEE countries is magyarorszag.hu, which means 'hungary.hu.' This e-government project provides various kinds of administrative services, governmental information and interactive features addressed both to individual citizens and the business sector. This is a specific project, mostly because it is rare for a governmental service to have only slightly lower reach than international portals such as Yahoo. In January 2009, magyarorszag.hu attained a reach level of almost 20 percent.

A very significant role is played in Hungary by vertical portals. The most popular is nlc.hu, an online magazine for women, providing many lifestyle features typical of portals, in addition to a blog platform, online shopping, dating service, games and multimedia galleries. However, because this portal has a well-defined target group, it shouldn't be considered as a horizontal site. Within the leading group of vertical portals there are also two significant websites:

fn.hu and sg.hu. The former is a news portal that publishes information focused on business, the economy and politics. However, it has been evolving towards a horizontal portal, placing greater emphasis on sports, culture, travel and technology.

Looking at the most popular online projects of the region, it is clear that media companies are learning how to stream the flow of media content across delivery channels to expand revenue opportunities, broaden markets and reinforce consumer loyalty and commitment. However, as defined by Jenkins and Deuze (2008), media convergence is both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process. In this process, users are also learning how to use different media technologies to bring the streams of media content more under their control and to interact and generate content with other users. Sometimes, these two tendencies reinforce each other, creating closer, more rewarding, relations between media producers and consumers, or media contents and citizens. Yet these two forces can also come into conflict, resulting in constant renegotiations of power between these competing pressures on the new media environments (McChesney 2001; Jenkins & Deuze 2008).

When we look at the news portals other than online versions of off-line newspapers, a few of them are also engaged in content production for their own use. According to Lithuanian Delfi CEO Monica Garbauscite (in personal interview), Delfi has its own content production that aims to provide background to political events, but also reports about politics to keep power holders accountable. The news however, should have a 'sexy,' i.e., selling edge because the economy of news portals is based on the figures of visitors (hits) and the time users spend online. So, as noted by the senior Lithuanian journalist quoted at the beginning, the main product of the news portals is not independent 'quality' news journalism, but entertainment, scandal and gossip that attract users to revisit their sites. Accordingly, the agenda of the day does not necessarily follow the principles of social responsibility or accountability, but that of the market. As one young news portal reporter put it:

> As they say. . .the greatest power of the media is the power to ignore. The worst thing about this power is that you may not even know you're using it. Or you have a good reason to ignore something. (Lithuanian journalist, news portal Delfi)

Welcome to the Future: New Europe, New Media Systems?

Today, CEE media operate primarily according to business logic, regardless of their status. Media depend heavily on advertisers, consumer fees and corporate or ownership sponsors. In the countries under discussion, state intervention is usually minimal. The primary task for the Central and Eastern European politicians was, in part, to create favourable and deregulated conditions for investment and corporations and this in turn affected the formation and nature of evolving media systems. The fact that the media are predominantly business ventures also has meant that they are affected by the same trends as in other markets, such as globalisation, digitalization, marketization and deregulation that are transforming news business in general and CEE media systems in particular (Castells 2007, 71).

However, the usual assumption that the Western media systems are always more advanced and the CEE countries are always 'catching up' might be a bit misleading. Paradoxically one could easily claim that Central Eastern Europe actually profited from a 'backwardness rent' and the ability to leapfrog stages of development, allowing them to start from a point which Western countries have yet to reach—and that is a place much sought after by the global big media houses such as Murdoch's News Corp. This could be described as a deregulated media environment, based on liberal capitalism and open markets, with no tradition of or substantial resources for PSM (and citizens that were not so taken with the idea of public service media in the first place) and fast digitalisation of media that brought along new generation of 'digital natives' with intensive online media use (Salovaara-Moring 2010, 2009).

Hence, by looking at the relationship between technological convergences and changing media systems in the CEE region, two tendencies are clearly visible. First, the Internet and digital convergence of news media undercut the viability of the traditional business model of print media capable of offering critical news journalism as the main product. Second, the Internet promises extensions of news production that media systems do not yet deliver. Especially in the case of developing PSM platforms further, distribution of the content could become less expensive and easily arranged since the Internet is a territorial platform that is smoothly extending cultural and, sometimes, linguistic boundaries. That would enrich available content by adding the public service value of PSM content. For this to happen, however, public and/or political intervention would be required, emphasising the significance of informed citizenship, the role of PSM companies and quality of news production as part of democratic societies.

In any case, these new characteristics of media systems point to the fact that publics, networks and communities are not solely products or service innovations. Rather, they are, in equal parts, strategic and management innovations. In that sense, the Internet has resulted in democratisation of the media that has fundamentally changed the position of the people we once merely called 'the public' by making their role much more interactive. New media also provide governments as well as civil society actors with fresh tools with which to engage with the public(s) and compete for their attention. This development holds the potential for an unprecedented variety of voices and services, but it also gives free rein to corporate-driven and entertainment-led modification of CEE media systems.

New media technologies, ways to engage in online and networked journalism, linkages and alliances across converged traditional media are driving pro-

found changes in more areas than business models and media usage. This concerns also political governance, as well as social, political and aesthetic experiences of communities. The media systems of our time are unique in their instability and their complex, ongoing transformations. This is due to the digital era habits and behaviour of citizens whose understanding or knowledge of both media and politics is in flux.

However, this is not to ascribe to the new technologies an intrinsic, autonomous power to modify and transform society. They are always embedded in their cultural and regional context. According to Raymond Williams (1974), we must understand that the emergence of new communication systems results from complex interactions among technological, social, cultural, political, historical, legal and economic forces. Different political cultures and regimes will exploit and use technologies in radically different ways. Central and Eastern European media system development is still a work in progress and its final trajectories are unknown. One thing is clear, however; developments of the region should be closely followed, since they will provide a fair predictor of where the West will go.

Notes

1. Online news portal figures and information is based on the Gemius Report (2009), Pelc et al.

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